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January 20, 2004

Leslie Grober
Regional Water Quality Control Board
11020 Sun Center Drive #200
Rancho Cordova, CA 95670-6114

Subject: Comments on Salt and Boron Draft Basin Plan
Amendment and Technical TMDL

Dear Les:

I am representing the Grassland Area Farmers who have implemented the Grassland Bypass Project. This project manages the discharge of subsurface drainage water from within the Grassland Drainage Area. This area is subject to the selenium regulation program WDR 5-01-234.

Comment #1. Need for coordination with other programs.

I would like to commend the effort to coordinate this regulation with others facing non-point dischargers. The selenium program, salt and boron, pesticide, dissolved oxygen and future programs need coordination to be successful. For example there is the danger that the salt and boron TMDL would encourage dischargers to hold all tailwater returns to the San Joaquin River with concentrations higher than 315 micromhos (Section 4.4.6, Discussion on Alternative 4a/4b) significantly reducing flows in the River. There is a need for Regional Board coordination of all the regulatory programs affecting specific areas like the Grassland Drainage Area.

Comment #2. Need for salt balance.

I appreciate the fact that the staff report recognizes the necessity of a salt balance in the non-point source lands (Section 4.4.1, Discussion on Real-time Load Allocations). This is vital to maintain irrigated agriculture in the over 1 million acres subject to this regulation.

Comment #3. The Grassland Bypass Project has already resulted in reduced salt loading to the San Joaquin River.
See annual reports for the Grassland Bypass Project.

Comment #4. Control of groundwater accretions.
The staff report notes that at times groundwater accretion to the San Joaquin River may exceed objectives (Section 4.4.3). This points to the difficulty of final implementation and compliance.

Comment #5. Support for Real time option.
Clearly the only way the salt and boron regulation has a chance to succeed is through the real-time operation option designated as alternates 4a and 4b (Section 4.4.6). This is also identified as the least cost option although I am apprehensive about the difference between the cost of this option compared with others. It is listed as 70% to 80% less than other options.

Comment #6. Postage Stamp Allocations.
The proposed load allocations are on a postage stamp basis (Table IV-7). We have experience from the selenium trading program within our Drainage Area and prefer this postage stamp basis to allocations to individual subareas.

Comment #7. Problem with monthly allocations.
The minimal discharge allowance in certain peak summer months (Table IV-7), notwithstanding the relaxations, is very restrictive and will need time and money to implement.

Comment #8. Implementation period too short.
The time for implementation (Table IV-6) is not consistent with other regulatory non-point processes. For example the selenium control program has a timetable of 15 years from adoption of the Basin Plan to complete compliance. The timetable in Table IV-6 for "high" priority areas is 8 to 12 years. Yet for Low priority areas the timetable is longer. It seems this is reversed from what should be the case, that is areas that will have the most difficult time meeting the load limits should have the longest time to implement. It appears that one component which has not been included is the time to educate the regulated community. I would recommend an implementation period for "High" priority areas be 15 years for Wet through Dry Year Types and 20 years for Critical Year Types.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment and can be contacted directly at 559-582-9237.

Very truly yours,

Joseph C. McGahan
Drainage Coordinator for the Grassland Area Farmers

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